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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 001134

SIPDIS

NSC FOR TOM SHANNON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/01/2014

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SUBJECT: ROPE A DOPE

CLASSIFIED BY: AMBASSADOR CHARLES S. SHAPIRO FOR
REASON 1.4 (D).

GREENBERG POLL: CHAVEZ DOWN 10 POINTS

1. (C) I HOSTED A MEETING THIS MORNING IN WHICH MARK FEIERSTIEN, PROJECT MANAGER FOR POLLING FIRM GREENBERG QUINLAN ROSNER RESEARCH, BRIEFED THE AMBASSADORS OF BRAZIL, CANADA, CHILE, MEXICO, AND PORTUGAL AND MYSELF ON THE RESULTS OF THE POLL HE COMPLETED ON MARCH 27. (HE PROMISED TO SEND US THE POWER POINT PRESENTATION WHICH WE WILL FORWARD TO WHA/AND.) IN GENERAL, THE RESULTS ARE THAT SINCE NOVEMBER, CHAVEZ HAS DROPPED AROUND 10 POINTS ON A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT INDICATORS TO THE LOW TO MID-30S, DEPENDING ON HOW THE QUESTION IS PHRASED. ON THE REFERENDUM, LIKELY VOTERS FAVOR RECALLING CHAVEZ BY A MARGIN OF 62-31. THOSE POLLED -- 1000 LIKELY VOTERS -- OVERWHELMINGLY WANT THE OPPOSITION TO EXHAUST ALL LEGAL MEANS TO ACHIEVE A RECALL REFERENDUM.

CHAVEZ TO BLAME FOR BAD RELATIONS WITH U.S.

2. (C) ONE ADDITIONAL CONCLUSION STRUCK ME AS KEY: VENEZUELAN OVERWHELMINGLY BLAME CHAVEZ FOR THE POOR STATE OF U.S.- VENEZUELAN RELATIONS. ONLY 24 PERCENT APPROVE (7 PERCENT APPROVE STRONGLY, 17 PERCENT APPROVE) OF CHAVEZ'S HANDLING OF THE RELATIONSHIP, THE LOWEST APPROVAL SCORE OF ANY OF THE ISSUES POLLED. IN CONTRAST, 44 PERCENT APPROVE OF HOW HE IS DEALING WITH POVERTY. TO PUT THE ABOVE IN A DIFFERENT CONTEXT, WHILE 25 PERCENT APPROVE STRONGLY OF CHAVEZ OVERALL, ONLY 7 PERCENT APPROVE STRONGLY OF HIS HANDLING OF U.S.-VENEZUELAN RELATIONS. IN OTHER WORDS, EVEN HARD-CORE CHAVISTAS DISAPPROVE OF HOW CHAVEZ IS MANAGING RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. FEIERSTEIN ADDED THAT IN SIX FOCUS GROUPS CONDUCTED, CHAVISTAS OBJECTED TO CHAVEZ'S INCENDIARY LANGUAGE AND THEY OBJECTED MOST OF ALL TO LANGUAGE USED WITH REGARD TO THE U.S.

ROPE A DOPE

3. (C) CHAVEZ IS HURTING HIMSELF WITH HIS CONSTANT ATTACKS ON THE U.S. AMBASSADOR MAISTO DID A SUPERB JOB OF MAINTAINING THE HIGH GROUND IN REPLYING TO CHAVEZ'S BIZARRE ACCUSATIONS IN THE OAS PERMANENT COUNCIL. CHAVEZ WOULD LOVE FOR US TO ENGAGE IN A MUD-SLINGING CONTEST WITH HIM. THE WORST OUTCOME FOR HIM IS FOR US TO REFUSE TO STOOP TO HIS LEVEL. BY IGNORING HIM, OUR MESSAGE IS THAT HIS OUTRAGEOUS TRASH TALK DOES NOT EVEN MERIT A RESPONSE.
SHAPIRO

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